

District 45 March 2026 Election Analysis

The March 17 Primary Election saw the referendum narrowly defeated, securing 48.7% of the vote and losing by a margin of just 193 votes. While the referendum garnered significant support, several key factors contributed to its ultimate loss, including voter education gaps, turnout dynamics, and geographical disparities.

High turnout was anticipated, and political demographics more favorable to the referendum accounted for nearly 70% of the ballots cast on the referendum. However, the referendum's success was hindered by a lack of voter awareness about its importance. While the community education program was robust, many voters who participated in the election were not adequately informed enough to grasp the purpose or the stakes involved in the referendum, which significantly impacted the results.

In precincts where the referendum struggled, you can see as high as over a 55% drop off of voters supporting more liberal US Senate candidates and not supporting the referendum, and similarly, you see a 50% drop off of voters supporting incumbent Governor JB Pritzker and not supporting the referendum.

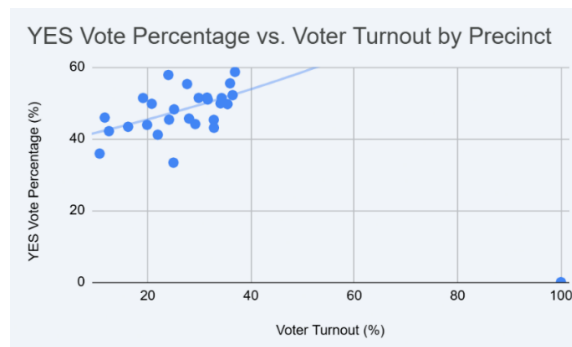
If community outreach had been higher in the areas where support was lower, the referendum may have been successful.

A Higher Voter Turnout But Less Informed Voters

The 2026 Primary Election saw an unusually high voter turnout in District 45, surpassing 27% for the first time in the past four even-numbered years. While this increase was largely driven by higher-than-normal Democratic participation (69% of primary ballots compared to just 27% for Republicans), these voters were less favorable to the referendum than expected. High-turnout elections often bring out voters who are less familiar with down-ballot measures like referendums, especially hard-to-understand Limiting Rate Increases. This trend was evident in District 45, where the referendum struggled to convert these voters into supporters.

As a result, a less-than-effective campaign apparatus hindered converting those who turned out to vote “Yes.”

Turnout played a key role in how the referendum performed. The top turnout precinct, York 38, was also the best performing precinct for the “Yes” vote, winning with ~59% of the vote. On the other side, the lowest turnout precinct, York 54 (partial), was the second worst performing with only ~36% of the vote. Generally speaking, the greater the percentage of people who showed up, the better the referendum did, as displayed by the chart below:



This pattern underscores the importance of both turnout and voter education in determining the referendum's success.

Geographical Breakdown

Geography played a crucial role in the referendum's results. The referendum performed better in Villa Park but struggled outside of the village.

- Inside Villa Park, the "Yes" vote was able to win 50.62% of the vote.
- The portion of the district in Lombard only garnered 46.39% of the "Yes" vote.
- The referendum really struggled in Oak Brook Terrace with just 33.33% of the "Yes" vote.
- The sole precinct in Elmhurst carried 51.38% support for the referendum.

We can pinpoint 4 key precincts that primarily pulled the referendum down. On the southern end of the district boundary line, precincts York 46 (Lombard) lost by 42 votes, York 67 (Lombard) lost by 51 votes, and York 68 (Oak Brook Terrace) lost by 106 votes. Primarily surrounding York 67 & 68 are schools not part of the district, including Montini Catholic. In the northern part of the district boundary, York 4 (Lombard) lost by 41 votes.

In contrast, the heart of the district—precincts York 16, 24, 25, 26, 34, 36, 37, and 38—formed a beltway of strong support for the referendum. These precincts demonstrated the potential for success when outreach and education efforts are effectively concentrated.

Positives and Recommendations

Despite the loss, the good news is there is clearly a path to getting a referendum passed in District 45 in November with the following actions:

Educate the Community on Immediate Impacts: First, the district should immediately start informing the community about the negative effects currently scheduled for the 2026-27 school year, including teacher layoffs, increasing class sizes, and reductions in programming. Parents and others in the community need to know that these negative effects will be instituted in August as a result of the referendum loss and will impact the level of education the district is able to provide to students. Special presentations, community outreach, and meet and greets with residents and business owners would educate them on the need for additional funding.

Engage and Educate Parents and Staff: Second, the district must educate staff and parents more about these negative effects and how a successful referendum in November would overcome them. No referendum can pass without full-fledged support from the district's base, which is primarily made up of parents with children currently in the district and staff. This should be possible, as the referendum would have an extremely positive effect on education in the district, allowing the rehiring of teachers, reduction in class sizes, and resumption of full programming.

Highlight Long-Term Consequences: Third, in its community education program for a November 2026 referendum, the district should highlight the additional negative consequences that could occur in the 2027-28 school year and beyond if a November referendum is not successful. This could include potential school closures and cuts to extracurriculars, such as sports, music and clubs.

Demonstrate Economic Sensitivity: Fourth, the district should monitor the economy as it relates to the overall tax impact on residents. If economic challenges continue to exist, the district could slightly reduce the size of the tax rate increase to reduce the tax impact on the community. This would show the community the district heard what the community said in March and are willing to reduce the tax impact to reflect continuing economic challenges.

Conclusion

The March 2026 referendum in District 45 was a close contest, ultimately falling short by just 193 votes. While high voter turnout presented an opportunity, gaps in voter education coupled with geographical disparities, proved to be significant challenges. By addressing these issues and implementing targeted strategies, future efforts can build on this experience to achieve success.